

Photo exhibit shows sexy, powerful view of disabled women

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MORIS MORENO

'I ENJOY LIFE': Former model Wendy Crawford, who is a quadriplegic, does outreach work for people with disabilities.

- [Visiting the exhibit | *Uncensored Life -- Raw Beauty*](#)
- [Video | Slideshow of photos from exhibit](#)

They are usually ignored.

Until now.

In a Miami gallery, the disabled women are larger than life, displayed in portraits splashed on white-washed gallery walls, nude on the beach or giving a come-hither look while perched on a stainless steel wheelchair.

One woman playfully dons black wings while another pretends to be a silent-movie damsel in distress, tied to the railroad tracks as a train approaches.

In all, 20 women with disabilities bare their souls -- if not their bodies -- for a new exhibit, *Uncensored Life -- Raw Beauty* at the Dorsch Gallery in Miami. The exhibit includes photographs, poems, mini-biographies and quotes from South Florida women who were born with cerebral palsy, spina bifida or are paralyzed, blind or deaf.

"I always thought this would be a great idea," says Wendy Crawford, 41, a former model whom a drunk driver left a quadriplegic when she was 19.

She fit her sensuous wheelchair-pose photography session into an already busy schedule of fundraising and outreach work for people with disabilities. She also scuba dives and swims.

"I enjoy life," she says. "Being depressed gets boring after a while."

She and others want to show a side of themselves not usually noticed by others.

POETRY, TOO

Quadriplegic Marjorie Layne Burnett, 39, bared her body on a South Florida beach and wrote a poem for the exhibit that included the lines:

"I am sexual

Just take a look

Open your eyes wide

See the real me."

"These women are gorgeous," says Ginny Dixon, a photographer who shared in two Pulitzer Prizes while at The Los Angeles Times. She led the project and photographed six of the women, including one who can move only her neck. Miami Ad School photographers also donated their time as photographers.

"It's one of the best things I have ever participated in," Dixon says.

Dr. Susan Solman, a 44-year-old podiatrist and pharmacist who owns her own healthcare business, posed for Dixon, smiling in a sensuous above-the-chest nude shot.

"I have finally learned how to embrace who I am," says Solman, who became a paraplegic five years ago after suffering a tumor on her spinal cord.

LEARNING EMPATHY

"I have learned what it is like to be weak and vulnerable, which has taught me empathy and compassion," she wrote in her bio for the exhibit.

Her friend, Rochelle Baer, 42, who has rheumatoid arthritis, persuaded her to be part of the project.

Baer at first thought of creating and selling a calendar of nude disabled women to help raise money for the Center for Independent Living, an agency that offers independent living, job placement and other free services to the disabled.

SPORTSWOMEN

But then the project expanded into not only photographing the women's sensuality but also their empowerment. The women are doctors, artists, social workers and business owners. They participate in all sorts of sports.

Shanti Nair, 39, who was born with spina bifida, is photographed sailing by herself on Biscayne Bay.

Her parents had been afraid for her when she moved from India to South Florida.

But she knew she had to leave to enjoy a more active life. Buildings in the United States are much more accessible to the handicapped than in her native India, she wrote in her biography for the exhibit.

Then there's Adina Beth, 30. She rides her Harley -- and horses. Dixon photographed her nuzzling a horse. Beth also barrel races and gardens.

She has learned to use her deafness to her advantage. "When I don't want to hear what people are saying, I just turn off my cochlear implant," she jokes in her bio.

Another model, Joy Nabors, 33, is photographed dancing in a wheelchair. Multiple sclerosis may keep her in the wheelchair, she says, "but I am flying high as a kite when I dance."

UNCENSORED

LIFE RAW/BEAUTY

May 19, 2006 6:30 to 11pm

Dorsch Gallery Wynwood Art District
151 NW 24th St. Miami, FL 33127

www.rawbeautyproject.com

Photo exhibit of 20 extraordinary women with disabilities portraying, beauty, strength and inspiration.

\$15 in advance/\$20 at door
Full Bacardi Bar • hors d'oeuvres

Proceeds go directly to Center for Independent Living of S. FL to fund programs and services for persons with disabilities.

For advance tickets call 305 751 8025
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